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LOS ANGELES SCHOOLS

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The marvelous growth of Los Angeles during the past decade is almost without parallel. The city today has a population of more than 280,000 souls. There are 50,000 children enrolled in the public schools. These children are taught by more than 1,000 teachers. The great growth of the city has been due in no small measure to its excellent school facilities. Although the development of the city has been almost unprecedented, the schools have kept well in the vanguard. The excellent condition of the schools is largely due to the fact that the people at large take such an active interest in all school matters. Perhaps the people of no other city have such civic pride in their public schools as the people of Los Angeles.

About three years ago, as the result of a campaign of education, about one hundred of the leading men of the city met to discuss the advisability of placing the administration of the public schools in the hands of a non-partisan board of education, consisting of seven members to be elected at large. The meeting of this committee of one hundred resulted in the nomination by petition of seven of the most prominent men of the city without regard to political affiliation. This non-partisan board of education was elected by a large majority over the regular party nominees. The conduct of school affairs by these men during the two years of their incumbency was so eminently successful that a non-partisan school board in Los Angeles is no longer a theory, for at the last municipal election, held in December of last year another non-partisan board of education was elected with practically no opposition.

Los Angeles has also been fortunate in the character of its teachers. This can be attributed to the standard of requirement and the location of the city. Before being eligible to take the examinations for a position in the city schools, a teacher must

be a graduate of a high school and a normal school. Many men and women who have attained success as teachers in the East have been attracted to this city by the delightful climate of southern California. Los Angeles, as the metropolis of the Southwest, has been the natural center to which they have come. A careful study of the city school statistics for the past ten years shows that a large percentage of the successful teachers have been teachers of experience from the North and East. This cosmopolitan teaching corps has continually infused new life and new ideas into the school system, and as a result Los Angeles has gleaned the best from far and near.

One of the most important branches of the school department is the one that looks after the physical health of the children. This department is systematically organized, and once each term every child in the schools is examined for physical defects. Nurses are employed whose entire time is devoted to visiting the schools and making personal inspections. Any illness or any defective child is at once reported, and competent medical attention is available immediately, regardless of the condition of the family from which the child comes. The services of the best specialists in the city are at the command of the child from the poorest home. In the congested districts hundreds of poor children are given medical attention each year through the efforts of the school department.

A feature of the Los Angeles schools that is unique is the method of handling truancy. The city has established three special schools to which persistent truants and so-called incorrigibles are sent. No coercion nor force is ever employed in transferring these pupils from the regular schools to the special schools. No truant officer nor even a teacher accompanies them. They are told the purpose of these schools and the reason they are sent there, and then allowed to go of their own accord. No pupil sent in this way has yet failed to reach the special school promptly. The teachers in these schools are all men. In these special schools no corporal punishment is used, and the only means by which truants are kept there is the personality of the teacher and an appeal to the fairness of the boy. The schools

have no connection with the juvenile court, and no recourse is had to the court or any officer to enforce a pupil's attendance at these schools; yet the remarkable fact remains that these schools, composed of the so-called incorrigibles and persistent truants, have maintained for a year an average attendance of 'over 98 per cent. After a boy has attended one of these schools for a period ranging from a few weeks to a few months, he is sent back to his own school, or in some cases to another school. The great purpose of these special schools is to prevent boys from being arrested for truancy and to keep them, as far as possible, in their own school, or, if taken from their own school, to return them to a regular school as speedily as their welfare will permit. In this way boys are corrected of their truancy without the stigma of a juvenile-court record. In attempting to solve the truancy question the Los Angeles schools have met with gratifying results.

The ungraded school was introduced into the department about five years ago. Today there are twenty-two ungraded rooms in the city, and their value has been amply demonstrated. To these rooms are sent pupils who are unable to keep up with the regular class work; who have recently come from a school where the course of study is radically different from that of Los Angeles; who are too bright for the average grade, and any others who for any reason are not adapted to the regular classroom work. Since the introduction of these ungraded rooms the number of expulsions and suspensions in the city schools, despite the great increase in population, has steadily declined. These rooms have been the means of keeping in school many boys and girls who otherwise would have dropped out of school all too soon.

Los Angeles is justly proud of its large Polytechnic High School, erected two years ago.¹ This is one of the best-equipped schools of its kind in the West. In response to a popular demand, the school has a night session from seven to nine o'clock. In all 2,100 pupils attend the school daily. This great school

¹ See frontispiece.

educates for practical life many of the large percentage of high-school pupils who never go to the university.

Taken in its entity, the Los Angeles school department keeps well apace with the best educational thought and movement of the day, and in a city whose civic pride is so pronounced the continued advancement of the schools is assured.